Message

From: Deegan, Dave [Deegan.Dave@epa.gov]
Sent: 11/25/2020 4:32:47 PM
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Subject: FW: Daily News Clips: Morning Edition, 11/25/20

From: Kibilov, Nicholas
Sent: Wednesday, November 25, 2020 11:32:41 AM (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada)
To: AO OPA OMR CLIPS
Subject: Daily News Clips: Morning Edition, 11/25/20

Daily News Clips: November 25, 2020 (morning edition)
Administrator
Newsweek: As China War Threat Continues, Trump EPA Head Cancels Taiwan Trip
TaiPei Times: MOFA regrets Wheeler trip canceled
Chemicals
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WWD: PITTSBURGH WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY VIOLATES CLEAN WATER ACT

As China War Threat Continues, Trump EPA Head Cancels Taiwan Trip
https://www.newsweek.com/china-war-threat-continues-trump-epa-head-cancels-taiwan-trip-1550138
BY JOHN FENG ON 11/25/20 AT 9:33 AM EST

United States Environmental Protection Agency head Andrew Wheeler has called off his scheduled visit to Taiwan next month, the island's foreign minister confirmed Wednesday.
News of the Trump appointee's proposed three-day visit to Taipei in the week of December 5 riled China, which reacted equally threateningly to three trips made by U.S. officials since August.

Taiwan regretted the cancelation of Wheeler's Taiwan visit, which the EPA said was due to a change in the administrator's itinerary, Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu told reporters after a committee meeting.

Taipei said it would continue its environmental cooperation with the United States and facilitate any future visits under President-elect Joe Biden.

Earlier this month, The New York Times reported that Wheeler had scheduled two foreign trips before leaving office. They reportedly included a 10-person team for Taiwan in order to discuss marine pollution.

The schedule change was first reported by Bloomberg on Tuesday, when it cited scrutiny over the trip's high costs amid the Trump administration's transition period.

"Due to pressing domestic priorities at home, Administrator Wheeler's visit to Taiwan has been postponed," EPA spokesperson James Hewitt told Bloomberg.

China's foreign ministry and state-run media issued sharp warnings to the Trump administration and the government of Taiwan this week following the reported visit to Taipei by Rear Admiral Michael Studeman on Sunday.

Beijing's People's Liberation Army buzzed warplanes near the democratic island and sent aircraft into Taiwan's air defense identification zone after Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar visited in August.

It was the highest-level visit by a U.S. cabinet official since Washington and Taipei ended formal diplomatic ties over four decades ago.

In another show of America's support for Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen, the Trump administration then sent Undersecretary of State Keith Krach to Taipei in September, again angering the Chinese leadership.

This month, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense began tallying PLA military aircraft incursions into Taipei's airspace on its website. In October, defense minister Yen De-fa said Chinese warplanes had made the most sorties across the Taiwan Strait median line this year since 1990.

Taiwan has received unprecedented backing from the United States under Donald Trump, whose administration has sanctioned the sales of defensive weaponry worth billions of dollars.

At a daily press briefing Wednesday, Taiwan's foreign ministry spokesperson Joanne Ou thanked President Trump for elevating U.S.-Taiwan relations to a "historic high."

"Taiwan will continue to be a close and reliable partner of the U.S," she said, while stressing the island's eagerness to work with the incoming Biden administration.

Hsiao Bi-khim, Taiwan's representative to the U.S., phoned Biden's adviser and secretary of state pick Antony Blinken to congratulate him on the former vice president's election win last week.

Ou said the call highlighted Taipei's continued communication and interaction with the Biden camp.

Analysts in China and Taiwan are expecting a shift in foreign policy approach under Blinken, who also worked under President Barack Obama.

Beijing in particular sees Blinken as offering a window of opportunity to normalize relations with Washington, which nosedived during Trump's ongoing trade war and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's anti-China stance.

MOFA regrets Wheeler trip canceled
https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2020/11/26/2003747627
Thu, Nov 26, 2020

COOPERATION: Taipei will continue to promote visits by US officials and collaborations on environmental issues with the future US administration, the foreign ministry said

Bloomberg and staff writer, with CAN

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) yesterday expressed regret over the cancelation of a planned visit to Taiwan next month by US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Andrew Wheeler, but added that cooperation on environmental initiatives would continue.

"Due to pressing domestic priorities at home, Administrator Wheeler's visit to Taiwan has been postponed," EPA spokesman James Hewitt said on Tuesday by e-mail.

Wheeler's trip was originally planned following several high-level visits by US officials to Taiwan in the past few months, as well as stepped-up arms sales.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler testifies at a hearing in the Dirksen Senate Office Building in Washington on May 20.
Photo: Reuters

Taiwan regretted the cancelation, ministry spokeswoman Joanne Ou (歐江安) said in a text message yesterday, adding that Taipei would continue to promote future Cabinet-level visits and collaboration on environmental issues with the incoming administration of US president-elect Joe Biden.

In Washington, Representative to the US Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭美琴) on Tuesday also expressed regret over the cancelation of the trip, but added that Taiwan and the US would continue their cooperation on environmental initiatives.

Wheeler and his delegation had planned to visit Taiwan for three days to discuss a wide range of topics, such as ocean trash, air quality and child health, media reports said.

The visit had drawn scrutiny in the US for its potentially high price tag, with a charter flight planned to transport Wheeler and other EPA staff to Taiwan because of COVID-19 concerns.

A separate trip by Wheeler to Latin American countries, including possibly Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic, is still expected just ahead of Biden's inauguration on Jan. 20.

Hewitt said the EPA would be asking the agency's inspector general to probe the disclosure of details surrounding Wheeler's Taiwan travel plans, after a New York Times report on the cost concerns.

"It is disturbing that a government official would leak deliberative schedules to the New York Times that could jeopardize both international diplomacy and personal security," Hewitt said.

Two high-level US officials have visited Taiwan in recent months.

In August, US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar became the highest-ranking US official to travel to Taiwan since the US broke off ties with Taipei in 1979.

US Undersecretary of State Keith Krach visited Taiwan a month later.

Both visits spurred angry reactions from Beijing, with Taiwan a focal point for spiraling tensions between the US and China.

There was speculation that Wheeler canceled his trip due to an unannounced visit by US Rear Admiral Michael Studeman, director of intelligence of the US Indo-Pacific Command, to Taipei on Sunday.

However, Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) disputed the speculation on the sidelines of a legislative meeting, saying the two matters were unrelated.

Studeman arrived at Taipei International Airport on a chartered plane for a three-day visit.

The plane departed from the same airport at about 7:10pm on Tuesday, according to photographs taken by local media.

The ministry did not confirm or comment on Studeman's visit.

EPA Component Failed to Keep Up Disaster Recovery During COVID-19
https://www.meritalk.com/articles/epa-component-failed-to-keep-up-disaster-recovery-during-covid-19/
BY: JOSH MAYO
NOV 25, 2020
9:47 AM

The Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB), a component agency of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), struggled to keep its disaster recovery plan in place during COVID-19, failing to store off-site backups and not conducting testing, according to a report released by the EPA's inspector general.

The report, conducted on behalf of the EPA's Office of the Inspector General and released November 18, found that the CSB was not storing offsite backups due to remote work procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic, falling short of guidance from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

"There is risk exposure that critical systems cannot be recovered timely if the primary location is not available," the report states. The report recommended that CSB examine alternative methods of backup storage, such as cloud or electronic vaulting, but CSB agreed to restart the regular backup process.

The lack of disaster recovery testing also raised concerns from the auditors, with no tests coming in fiscal year 2020. The root cause again fell on the pandemic and telework, with the agency not keeping up its normal procedures.

"Without adequate testing, the opportunity to practice, prepare, identify gaps, and ensure that the plan will work has not been completed," the auditors state. The report recommends that CSB perform a disaster recovery test on an annual basis, which the agency agreed to do. CSB also agreed to conduct a belated test for fiscal year 2020 by the end of December.

The importance of instrumentation
https://www.hydrocarbonengineering.com/special-reports/25112020/the-importance-of-instrumentation/
Published by Callum O'Reilly, Senior Editor
Hydrocarbon Engineering, Wednesday, 25 November 2020 14:40

The production of oil and heavy chemicals creates effluents, due to the nature of the processes and feedstocks, which are dispersed primarily in two streams: air and water. Air pollution tends to get more attention due to its visibility, but water pollutants can also become a serious issue because of their effect on drinking water supplies. In the US, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates petroleum refining effluents under 40 CFR Part 419, which dates back to 1974 and has been updated many times. Other similar bodies exist throughout the world covering their respective geographical areas.

As a result, refineries and chemical plants have sections of their facilities dedicated to water treatment (Figure 1), just as they have scrubbers and baghouses for air pollutants. These are critical processes because regulatory bodies can fine producers for violating water standards.

Figure 1. Refineries and large chemical processing plants invariably have a wastewater treatment plant for the facility.

As a case in point, the EPA launched an environmental compliance investigation into one US refinery in relation to spill prevention and wastewater discharge. The refinery was assessed civil penalties totalling more than US$225 000 and was required to install new monitoring equipment, update its cleaning and inspection programmes, and prevent future unauthorised discharges.

This was a significant fine, levied to convince management of the importance of compliance. In the worst case, a facility can lose its licence to operate for a period of time, further underscoring the importance of effective treatment and monitoring.

Sources of water pollution

The EPA has compiled lists of pollutants based on data collected and observations of working refineries: "The EPA used 2013 discharge monitoring report (DMR) data and knowledge of the process to identify 26 pollutants likely to be present in petroleum refining wastewater, including metals, nutrients, organics, and other priority pollutants. This listing includes pollutants with high toxicity (high toxic weight factors (TWF)), pollutants identified in the existing Petroleum Refining Effluent Guidelines or Refinery National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits, and pollutants that may be present in wet scrubber purge."1

A condensed list of water pollution sources includes:

Desalter water – water produced from washing raw crude prior to topping operations.
Sour water – wastewater from steam stripping and fractionating operations that comes into contact with the crude being processed.
Other process water – wastewater from product washing, catalyst regeneration, and dehydrogenation reactions.
Spent caustic – formed in extraction of acidic compounds from product streams.
Tank bottoms – bottom sediment and water settles to the bottom of tanks used to store raw crude. The bottoms are periodically removed.
Cooling tower – once-through cooling tower water and cooling tower blowdown to prevent build-up of dissolved solids in closed-loop cooling systems.
Condensate blowdown – blowdown from boilers and steam generators to control build-up of dissolved solids.
Source water treatment system – source water must be treated prior to use in the refinery. Waste streams may include water from sludge dewatering (if lime softening is used), ion exchange regeneration water, or reverse osmosis wastewater.
Storm water – process area and non-process area runoff from storm events.
Ballast water – ballast water from product tankers.
Scrubber water – wastewater taken from scrubbers once it is saturated with solids or captured effluent.

Sensors to identify critical pollutants

Once critical pollutants are identified, it is necessary to determine which are actually present and in what quantities. In a high-school chemistry class, this could be approached through a mix of distillation and boiling off of the water to see what residues are left. However, in a working refinery (Figure 2), at least some of the most critical measurements – particularly those that can fluctuate day-to-day – must be continuous and made in real-time so adjustments can be made to processes via automation systems. Others, such as specific heavy metals, may only call for taking periodic samples and performing laboratory analysis.

Figure 2. Different production units each create their unique range of effluents.

For example, choosing from the list of pollution sources above, how is it possible to monitor spent caustic wastewater? What pollutants might be contained in the stream, and what is the best sensor for the task?

To begin with, there is no reason to look for things that are not there. There is a short list of potential pollutants from a given source within a facility. The caustic hydrogen sulfide and mercaptan removal section of a unit is not likely to produce ammonia, so there is no need to look for it. So, the question becomes: how does the relevant effluent at this point in the process change water characteristics in a measurable way that can also indicate the amount of harmful pollutants?

For wastewater evaluation, there are four characteristics able to provide useful information for monitoring because \most effluents change at least one, if not more, of these characteristics in predictable ways:
pH (acid-alkaline scale).
Oxidation-reduction potential (ORP).
Conductivity.
Dissolved oxygen (DO).

Fortunately, all four of these can be quantified accurately and reliably by making measurements in real-time.

Matching sensor and effluent

The sensor selection process in each application should hinge on determining which water characteristic will change in the most measurable and quantifiable way. Remaining with the spent caustic example, such a stream will likely contain sulfides and carbonates, both of which can change the pH and conductivity. The questions will be: which in this case has the greater effect? Can one of those sensors provide an accurate picture, or are both necessary?

Answering these types of questions and making correct sensor selections calls for cooperation between the plant's internal engineering staff and trusted instrumentation partners. Questions of range, repeatability, accuracy, reliability, maintainability, and other performance characteristics need to be examined in specific situations. For example, in a given application, conductivity or pH could both be highly useful measurements, but conductivity might be less maintenance-intensive. In another situation, the opposite might be the case. The following typical sensor characteristics can help provide an initial sorting for a new application.

pH/ORP

Sensors for these two variables are very similar and some do double duty. An internal reference electrode provides a stable reference signal in changing process environments. These sensors can be maintenance-intensive, so selection must be made carefully to specify a unit able to function reliably for weeks or months at a time. Some sensors can be rebuilt easily, replacing the reference electrolyte to extend service life and maintain high accuracy. Poor-quality sensors can be damaged by electrolyte leakage or poisoning.

When supported by an advanced transmitter, high-quality pH/ORP sensors can reliably provide condition diagnostic information about the sensor itself and the process for long periods of time without any required maintenance.

Conductivity

Contacting sensors can typically handle specific ranges of electrolytic conductivity up to a maximum of 20 000 microsiemens per cm (µS/cm). They can determine the presence of acids and bases by raising conductivity, as

well as the presence of hydrocarbons in water by reducing it. Contacting sensors can be damaged by corrosive liquid attack and are best applied where there are not high levels of particulates. Some models can be inserted into the stream to take a reading and withdrawn when not needed.

DO

These sensors are usually installed in the wastewater treatment area to monitor aeration, indicating DO at the ppm level, so they monitor the process rather than identifying a specific effluent. There are two technologies: membrane-based amperometric sensors and optical DO sensors. The former contain an internal electrolyte to complete the circuit between the cathode exposed to the process media and the internal anode, along with a temperature sensor to compensate the reading for changes in the permeability of the membrane with temperature.

Optical DO sensors do not have the internal electrolyte, so they are less maintenance-intensive. They can calibrate themselves automatically in water-saturated air.

Aeration basins are often frothy and dirty environments, so DO sensors may end up being coated with sticky froth, which can impair effective measurements. This is especially problematic with amperometric designs. Some plants install an automated spray nozzle connected to a freshwater supply with a timer to clean the sensor periodically. Another option is to purchase membrane-based amperometric DO sensors with a jet spray cleaner option.

While all wastewater might ultimately end up in the plant's wastewater treatment plant, it will have come from many sources and some, such as spent caustic, will have already passed through a specialised pre-treatment process.

Monitoring from specific processes should be as close to the individual source as possible, since once the streams are mixed it will be far more difficult to attribute an effluent to a single source. Some measurements of the final mix and treated wastewater leaving the plant will undoubtedly be necessary, but these provide little indication as to the source.

Process control in addition to monitoring

While the discussion so far has been about wastewater treatment, these same techniques can support process control. As a case in point, a refinery in Asia had a problem with tank bottom water accumulating in naphtha and pyrolysis gasoline tanks. Draining this water periodically was a manual process, where an operator had to watch a sight glass as the water was being pumped out, often for hours at a time. The operator's job was to concentrate on the sight glass, and call the control room on a radio for a shutdown as soon as the liquid changed colour.

The plant automated this process by installing a retractable conductivity sensor. Now, when it is time to drain the tanks, the operator inserts the probe and opens the valve. Tank bottom water has normal conductivity of 650 to 1000 µS/cm. Once naphtha reaches the sensor, conductivity drops almost immediately, triggering the valve to shut down automatically.

The importance of instrumentation

Refining and heavy chemical manufacturing depends on well-functioning instrumentation and analysers. Monitoring and controlling production processes are a priority, but effluent monitoring is also critical. Avoiding fines is an obvious incentive, but more positive aspects – such as safety, environmental stewardship, and good corporate citizenship – should also drive decisions. Making effective analyser selections depends on a partnership with a provider able to help in the application of all aspects of a successful solution.

Reference
US EPA, 'Petroleum Refining Effluent Guidelines Studies and Guidance', https://www.epa.gov/eg/petroleum-refining-effluent-guidelines-studies-and-guidance

Written by Andrew Smith, Emerson, USA

AI Will Help Toledo, Ohio, Find and Replace Lead Pipes
https://statetechmagazine.com/article/2020/11/ai-will-help-toledo-ohio-find-and-replace-lead-pipes
by Phil Goldstein
25 Nov 2020

Toledo, Ohio, made the replacement of 30,000 lead water service lines a key priority last year to improve public safety, and now the city wants to accelerate the effort by leveraging artificial intelligence. The city will develop a machine learning program to determine where lead pipes might be located and then identify and prioritize which homes need to have their pipes replaced first.

As the Environmental Protection Agency notes, "lead is a toxic metal that can be harmful to human health even at low exposure levels."
"The most common sources of lead in drinking water are lead pipes, faucets, and fixtures," the EPA states. "In homes with lead pipes that connect the home to the water main, also known as lead services lines, these pipes are typically the most significant source of lead in the water."

In recent years, cities across the country have made the replacement of lead water service lines a top priority, though the response has been sluggish in some cities. The EPA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention agree that there is no known safe level of lead in a child's blood, and lead in children's blood can lead to behavior and learning problems, lower IQ and hyperactivity, slowed growth, hearing problems, anemia, and even death.

Toledo will receive a two-year, $200,000 grant from the EPA's State Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Cooperative Agreement (SEJCA) Program to help with the replacement, according to an EPA project summary.

Kurt Thiede, a regional administrator for the agency, tells Toledo newspaper The Blade that the goal is "to ensure clean air and clean water are basics shared by all, regardless of your ZIP code."

The project, Thiede says, "will reduce lead exposure risks for Toledo's most vulnerable residents by using historical data and technology to target lead service line replacements."

City officials have set a goal of replacing 1,000 lead lines annually, starting in 2020, The Blade reports.

The project will focus both on accelerating the identification and replacement of lead water service lines and the development of "a public education campaign aimed at the most vulnerable communities so they can minimize their lead exposure as the city replaces its service lines," according to the EPA.

The continued presence of lead pipes "poses a serious health risk to the community, especially for low-income and minority populations," the EPA notes.

The city — working in partnership with BlueConduit, Freshwater Future, the University of Toledo, the Toledo-Lucas County Health Department and local partners — "designed this project with the goal of reducing lead exposure through well-tested, data-driven prioritization techniques," the EPA notes.

Toledo will use a machine learning predictive model to assess the probability of lead water service lines on a home-by-home basis "based on existing parcel and neighborhood-level data and a representative sample of water service lines in the city taken by the project team."

That will allow the city to determine if a home has copper or lead pipes without having to dig them up, which will save both time and money. The city of Flint, Mich., used a similar tool to help it detect lead pipes in the city.

The data will then help the city determine which homes should receive targeted education, water filters and ultimately the prioritization of the lead pipe replacement. The city will hold stakeholder meetings and create educational materials with a focus on the city's high-risk communities.

EPA Awards Almost $1 Million to Research Combatting Harmful Algal Blooms in California
https://www.webwire.com/ViewPressRel.asp?aId=267042

LA Testing provides laboratory services to identify microbial contaminants and toxins to help protect the environment, public and to assist industries impacted by harmful algal blooms.

Huntington Beach, CA – WEBWIRE – Wednesday, November 25, 2020

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently announced $999,999 in funding to a California university research foundation to address the environmental challenges posed by harmful algal blooms (HABs). The university's research will focus on how to prevent and control HABs using runoff treatment systems to reduce nutrient discharges from farms.

"Harmful algal blooms clog waterways and release toxins that harm people, animals, aquatic ecosystems and drinking water supplies in California communities," reported EPA Pacific Southwest Regional Administrator John Busterud. "We are proud to help advance the progress of San Jose State's research on preventing and controlling these damaging blooms."

HABs can occur in both fresh and marine waters. Red tides, blue-green algae and cyanobacteria are all examples of HABs that can severely impact human health, aquatic ecosystems and the economy.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports that although human illnesses caused by HABs are rare, they can be debilitating or even fatal. In addition to potentially producing extremely dangerous toxins, harmful algal blooms can create dead zones by depleting oxygen in the water, raise treatment costs for drinking water and hurt a wide range of industries that depend on clean water.

"The EPA research funding is great news for the environment and all of the people and industries in California that are impacted each time there is an HAB," said Joseph Frasca, Senior Vice President of Marketing at LA Testing. "At LA Testing, our network of laboratories also support researchers, environmental groups and the industry with a wide range of HAB testing services. Available services include algal identification, algal biomass analysis and various algal toxins testing from water, air and soil samples."

LA Testing has even sponsored an educational video about HABs that can be seen at: https://youtu.be/JF8UnMJ84HU.

To learn more about HAB testing or other environmental, health and safety services, please visit www.LATesting.com, email info@LATesting.com or call (800) 755-1794.
About LA Testing
LA Testing is California's leading laboratory for indoor air quality testing of asbestos, mold, lead, VOCs, formaldehyde, soot, char, ash and smoke damage, particulates and other chemicals. In addition, LA Testing offers a full range of air sampling and investigative equipment to professionals and the general public. LA Testing maintains an extensive list of accreditations including: : AIHA-LAP, LLC (AIHA-LAP, LLC EMLAP, AIHA-LAP, LLC IHLAP, AIHA-LAP, LLC ELLAP), CDC ELITE, NVLAP, State of California, State of Hawaii Department of Health and other states. LA Testing, along with the EMSL Analytical, Inc. network, has multiple laboratories throughout California including South Pasadena, Huntington Beach, San Leandro, San Diego and Ontario.

(Press Release Image: https://photos.webwire.com/prmedia/9645/267042/267042-1.png)

EPA grants $3.224 million to protect Arkansas bodies of water
https://katv.com/news/local/epa-grants-3224-million-to-protect-arkansas-bodies-of-water
by Talk Business & Politics
Wednesday, November 25th 2020

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (TB&P) — U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Andrew Wheeler announced an award of $3.224 million to the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Commission to protect water quality statewide. The funding will support management programs for nonpoint source (NPS) water pollution, which is caused when rainfall or snowmelt carries pollutants into rivers, lakes and other water bodies.

"This funding to the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission will improve environmental protections against nonpoint source water pollution," said Wheeler. "Keeping this waste from making it into water bodies is difficult, but it has to be done, and EPA is happy to help Arkansas get on top of the problem."

"EPA's grant funding will help protect vital streams and habitats while ensuring communities have cleaner water," said Regional Administrator Ken McQueen. "We are grateful for our partnership with Arkansas and looking forward to continuing to strengthen our relationship to improve water quality."

"Arkansas is fortunate to have an abundance of rivers, lakes, and other water bodies that contribute greatly to our state's economy and our way of life. We appreciate the award of this funding that will be used to continue the important programs and partnerships that protect the quality of water across the state," said Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture Wes Ward.

This funding supports the state of Arkansas' NPS pollution management program, focusing on watersheds with water quality impairments caused by polluted runoff from non-point sources. NPS implementation projects include best management practice installations for animal wastes, sediment, pesticide and fertilizer control; other structural and non-structural practices; watershed planning, monitoring, technology demonstrations; and education and outreach programs.

Read the full story on the Talk Business & Politics website.

PITTSBURGH WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY VIOLATES CLEAN WATER ACT
https://www.wwdmag.com/sewage-dumping-stations/pittsburgh-water-and-sewer-authority-violates-clean-water-act
BY CRISTINA TUSER
NOV 25, 2020

PWSA pleads guilty to violating Clean Water Act and pumping sludge into Allegheny River

Employees and supervisors at the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority dumped sludge into the Allegheny River from the Aspinwall treatment facility for 7 years, violating the Clean Water Act.

This sent plumes of rust-colored chemicals into the river, reported the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

The authority pleaded guilty to eight federal charges, including seven counts of lying on written reports to the EPA. The pollution and false reports occurred between 2010 and 2017.

In a statement, PWSA said the authority has "fully cooperated" with the Department of Justice and the EPA and the actions that spurred the criminal charges did not jeopardize the safety of the water, reported the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

"Both compliance issues raised in the investigation have been rectified and had no impact on the quality or safety of the drinking water," said the statement. "The authority has altered the treatment plant to make these discharges to the river physically impossible."

In a plea agreement, PWSA agreed to pay $500,000 into a self-funded compliance program. This program will be monitored by the U.S. Attorney's Office and the authority will spend three years on probation. During this time, annual reports and audits must be submitted to the Department of Justice and the EPA.

Important to note is that the plea agreement bars PWSA from raising rates to pay for the fine.

The sludge was supposed to be pumped to the ALCOSAN waste treatment facility but instead, employees and supervisors at the Aspinwall plant would pump that sludge directly into the river, sometimes by physically turning a valve to release the sludge, according to the court documents.

The equipment used to measure the amount of sludge generated daily were broken for years, reported the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. Lijewski, the former supervisor, was directly involved in dumping the sludge into the river and directed other employees to do the same.